

order that faith may reach its full stature. Each member of Christ is thus able to be certain with the certainty of faith of the foundation truths which must be the starting point of this process. Apart from infallibility there can be no such objective certainty, and apart from objective certainty there is no norm for the elimination of subjective and emotional thinking.

In the same way the whole notion of sacramental validity is to provide a secure certainty that when the appropriate ordained signs and words are used the inner effect of grace will follow, provided no personal obstacle of sin or indifference is interposed to prevent it. Thus do sacraments, by their very nature, provide a guarantee, quite apart from emotional feeling, that such grace has actually been given and received.

We are printing in this number, to carry to a further point the idea of the necessity of an objective spirituality, two articles on baptism, the sacrament of initiation; the one doctrinal in its scope, the other liturgical, for it is the study of Christian doctrine and the expression of that doctrine in liturgy that can bring home to us most effectively the full meaning of the redemptive work wrought for us and in us by Christ and mediated to us by his Church. A further article deals with the relation of Christian liturgy to the liturgy of the synagogue thereby emphasizing the objectivity and continuity of worship based upon the inspired Word of God.

In the course of the coming year we hope to print from time to time further articles, on the other sacraments, written from the same two points of view, providing readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* by this means with some help in building their own personal lives upon a sound and objective basis of sacramental spirituality.



TOWARDS AN OBJECTIVE SPIRITUAL LIFE¹

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MANY people have a genuine desire for perfection and consistently strive to become better. Apart from the small failings which are inevitable, they keep up a constant and generous effort with a view to their spiritual pro-

¹ Translation by Kathleen Pond of an article which appeared in *La Vie Spirituelle* Sept.-Oct. 1944, since reproduced in pamphlet form by the Procure Generale du Clergé, 3 rue de Mezières, Paris VIe.

gress. Good will is the last thing they lack. *It is all the more important, then, that such people should not find that they have made a mistake as to the fundamental direction of their effort.* In exhorting them to become increasingly more generous, one has not even begun to tackle the problem, for what they need is not exhortation so much as direction. We should like to indicate here the main lines along which the spiritual life develops in accordance with prudence, in contradistinction to notions which are perhaps currently admitted, but which, in our opinion, have been insufficiently examined.

Thus people sometimes set out to 'correct themselves of their faults' and to 'avoid sin'. There is certainly good cause to work at this. But even supposing the effort were successful, what positive advantage would have been gained? Free from sin, free from faults, a soul is purified from evil, but is not yet in possession of the good. It is better, assuredly, to set as one's objective the acquisition and practice of the virtues. The elimination of sins and faults is naturally implied in this, but there is, in addition, aspiration towards something of real value by which the soul is enriched. To be without sin is still only a preliminary condition or, if you like, *the negative aspect of a spiritual situation which demands its positive complement.* The notion of virtue deserves to occupy a more important place than that of sin. The struggle against the latter becomes too thankless a task unless it is regarded as involving at the same time the advancement of virtue. Some souls are haunted by their sins. If they are not obsessed to an even greater degree by zeal for their virtues they will be unhappy and their efforts liable to prove a failure. Moreover, we should be careful to understand by virtues those qualities thanks to which the soul finds itself established in affinity with good, prompt to accomplish and ready to delight in it. It may be that in the beginning of the spiritual life, we are drawn to give more attention to sin than to virtue, since the urgent task is to dislodge the enemy; but afterwards people ought to know what is the purpose of the struggle they are making and that a time should come when, freed from sin, they will find their joy in the accomplishment of good.

The word *detachment* also holds sway over certain people's spiritual lives. It is authentic and no one dreams of eliminating it. It expresses the necessity we are under of renouncing such good things as in our particular case form an obstacle to greater good.

But viewed in this way, detachment is precisely and solely orientated towards *attachment*. Its justification is not to be found within itself. *Perfection consists in the substitution of the better for the worse, not only in the suppression of the worse.* It should, moreover, be realized that attachment to the things of the spiritual life requires a special education of the soul, and that it has not been acquired, indeed is far from being acquired, when people are satisfied with practising detachment in regard to natural things. There are two methods involved. *Distaste for the world cannot be equated with a longing for God.* It is recognized that if we do not renounce the world, we do not find God, but to have renounced the world does not immediately give us God. The adaptation to this new objective and its realization still have to be achieved. The positive work begins when the other is completed. Or, rather, detachment should only be put into operation concurrently with an attachment in which the deprivations one inflicts upon oneself in other directions are compensated and more than compensated. How many souls who are set upon renouncing themselves fail to aim at attachment! The sign that they have not replaced the thing they have cast aside by something better, is that they remain occupied with themselves. Their attention is focussed on the feelings they experience and the efforts they make. They watch themselves in every detail and perhaps with a certain amount of worry. They are anxious to know if their generosity is greater today than it was yesterday. If they were attached to something which drew and attracted them, they would not cross-examine themselves in this way. The *lack of aim* is the great trouble from which certain spiritual lives suffer. We no longer have the objectives we have detached ourselves from, but we certainly do not yet possess those we have neglected to acquire: whence it comes about that people fall back on themselves, treating their own soul as an objective whereas its very purpose is to take us beyond itself. Enamoured of their perfection, certain people give themselves up to refinements of analysis about their interior state which leave one dumbfounded. They have never finished prying into the remote corners of their soul. They wear themselves out with their self-examinations. One would think that their soul was the only one in the world. When we look at such people, it is easier to understand that detachment alone is not sufficient for the attainment of perfection.

Humility and Obedience in Objective Spirituality

According to whether one's spiritual life is established on the negative or the positive formula, subjectively or objectively, one is drawn to practise the virtues which it is commonly agreed play an important part in it, namely *humility* and *obedience*; but differently. For the man who is chiefly seeking to avoid pride and who keeps his eyes fixed upon himself, humility will consist in some sense in a forced attitude. With no point of comparison in respect of which to judge ourselves, we have no other resource, to become small in our own eyes, but actually to belittle ourselves or else to persist in false estimates of ourselves. *Whence comes the difficulty in many cases of reconciling humility with truth and even more with magnanimity.* We dare not recognize our qualities, and we exaggerate our failings lest, if we see ourselves as we really are, we fail to preserve humility. Modest actions are systematically cultivated, inferior work is sought after, anything which might exalt the person and bring with it the distinction of a certain importance, is dreaded, and we purchase the right to be both humble and true towards ourselves by the deliberate sacrifice of our full development. Is it not true that many have renounced the full affirmation of their personality in their fear of failing to reconcile it with the demands of humility? *They have stunted their development in order to retain the liberty to think themselves small.*

This is a virtue, then, it would seem, that is always accompanied by serious drawbacks. If people think that, it is because they have understood humility in the wrong way. People co-equate it with abasement pure and simple, whereas the abasement which is needed is that in which one holds oneself *in regard to God*. This last clause changes everything. In the case of the man whose only objective is himself, it is perfectly true that humility only comes into the scheme of things at the expense of other virtues: it suffers if one is fair to oneself or if one is magnanimous. But the error lies in having no other end than oneself. Once God becomes our objective, nothing is easier for the humble man than to cultivate both fairness to himself and magnanimity. He can perform the highest actions and give his personality the full development of which it is capable; he will recognize himself for what he is, with his failings, certainly, and his insufficiency, but also with his gifts and qualities, whether of the physical, intellectual or moral order: there is no danger for his humility.

For in relation to God he remains little. He knows that he is dependent on a sovereign power and will. He is merely occupying the place where God has set him and everything of good he has in him is measured strictly against the liberality which it has pleased God to have in his regard. *To stay humble, such a man has no need either to belittle himself or to lie to himself.* He is what he is, he intends to grow to the full stature of which he is capable. He remains rooted, however, in the conviction of his fundamental littleness, for he depends on God. We might even say that the greater the stature he attains to, the more sharply defined does the conviction of his dependence become in him: for the more one has received, the more dependent one is. To remain humble there is no need at all to twist the soul or to force oneself to be only a poor counterfeit of one's real self. To relate oneself to God frees one from such servitude. Humility is a virtue which so to speak forces the spiritual life to become objective.

Similarly with obedience. This virtue is often thought of as intended, like humility, to keep the subject in an attitude of submission which is supposed to have a value in itself. It is treated as an ascetical virtue, of personal interest. And to make it more effective in this sense, no hesitation is shown in extending its sphere and multiplying its acts. People think they have never obeyed enough. Initiative is shunned as a source of error and vanity or as at least depriving one of the merit of obedience. People make it a rule for themselves to act as little as possible on their own initiative. Obviously obedience understood in this way in turn constitutes a danger to another virtue, prudence, the virtue by which a man is made apt to conduct his own life in accordance with the judgments he makes and the decisions he takes. No one is dispensed from cultivating prudence. *Obedience is certainly not intended to make this virtue pointless.* With their minds fixed on qualities such as humility and obedience, certain spiritual persons cheerfully resolve to sacrifice other virtues, such as fairness and magnanimity, or, again, prudence. The cause in both cases is the same: they have formed for themselves a wholly subjective notion both of obedience and humility. They forget that humility is constituted in reference to God; they forget that obedience is a virtue not of personal, but of *social* interest. The reason for the virtue of obedience is the distribution of men into rulers and ruled. And the reason for such a distribution of men is because the

universe is thereby made more beautiful and the common good by that means better assured. Obedience consists of submission. One does not obey in order to maintain oneself in this state of submission, *but in order to concur in a good*, the good which enables the hierarchical organization of men to be achieved, and the dimensions of which exceed the good that the individual left to himself is capable of contributing, however great it be. In this sense obedience is *more a collaboration than a submission*. It appeals to the subject's sense of the common good no less than to that of his subordinate condition. It fits in perfectly with the subject's initiative, both with those he is permitted to make use of within the framework of obedience and those he exercises in the spheres in which he is self-dependent. Prompt to obey, he is equally prompt to act of his own accord. He is in the service of the good, and the good requires both dispositions. He is careful to discern accurately the precise limits of his condition as a subject not with a view to obeying as little as possible, but with that of *obeying where it is necessary and acting on his own initiative where it is necessary*. We should understand that in the spiritual life there are no one-track courses to be taken as if we were to say: For my part, I shall cultivate humility, or, again: I shall cultivate obedience. Once more, by following such a rule, we should be unfair to the other virtues. And thus we should be condemned to an impoverished spiritual life.

The famous question of the obedience of the judgment should be decided in accordance with the same principles. Let us not seek to know whether this conception of obedience has not, indeed, come about through certain superiors, who found it convenient that their subjects should have no judgment of their own. Let us confine our attention to the subjects themselves. Those who make it a law unto themselves to conform their judgment to that of the superiors certainly yield to the impulse we were already speaking of: they wish to remain in submission and the more extensive the submission, the better the obedience becomes. It is essential, however, to understand that *obedience is in no sense a virtue of the intelligence, but of the will*. In no sense is it intended to lead us to judge as the superior judges but to make our will pliable to the command we receive from him. It leaves intact our responsibility for taking care to judge rightly and think in accordance with truth. It may easily happen that one thinks

exactly the contrary of what the superior thinks, and yet one will not thereby be prevented from giving him a whole-hearted, prompt and joyful obedience. Such an attitude is less naïve than the other. Yet it takes more account of the real relationship which unites the subject with the superior. If it is distorted in the case of certain people, it is only because of the notion they have made for themselves of an obedience which has its purpose in itself, so to speak, whereas obedience is inscribed in an order of things in which personal preoccupations are largely superseded.

In a more general way, subjective spirituality will be characterized by a preoccupation, before all else, with the efforts one makes whereas in objective spirituality we are primarily desirous of practising good. Effort is an eminently subjective trait. If people value the actions they posit in terms of the effort they cost, the reason is that they have not yet become aware of the order of actions to their ends, whence their real value derives. To know whether an action costs us something or not, is not the point. We should ask ourselves what is its purpose and in what it consists. The hierarchy of actions among themselves is established in accordance with this rule. It is necessary to go so far as to say *that a good, or better action performed without effort is worth more than if it is accomplished with difficulty*: for it is the sign that one is then so much the more in harmony with the good. Pursued to its limits, the virtuous life should no longer bring effort in its train, and it would be all the more meritorious for that. It is often difficult to make spiritual people understand that *merit is not bound up with effort, but with the joyous eagerness with which one accomplishes good*. It is because they have not yet got beyond the subjective notion of the spiritual life. From what has been said it can be judged how disastrous it would be to cultivate in oneself, so to speak, the necessity of having to make efforts. Is it quite certain that some people do not practise making virtue difficult? They are afraid to find too much joy in practising good. They shun the pleasure they might find in it as a misfortune. Nowhere does the subjective idea of the spiritual life more clearly show its insufficiency and the constituent vice from which it suffers.

Cultivation of Objective Virtues

If the practice of certain virtues needs rectification, as we have seen, it is no less necessary, in a spiritual life objectively understood,

to give their full development to other virtues, with which one might be in danger of concerning oneself less. We refer to virtues of which the specific character is precisely to be objective, that is, ordained to a good which is distinct from the virtuous subject. They cause the man who practises them to get away from himself, attaching him to realities from which he receives an enrichment such as he would never have found in the care of his own soul alone. Certain virtues, indeed, are made for the good of the virtuous person. Through them he acquires self-mastery and brings about the rule of order within himself. No spiritual life is possible where these virtues have not played their part. One will thus begin by cultivating the cardinal virtues of temperance and fortitude, with all those others which concur in the discipline of the passions. In this way we take care of our soul in the exact meaning of the expression. We treat ourselves like someone who has to be made beautiful and good. We do not yet set before ourselves any other objective than the self. This is the first task of all. It is only, however, to be classed as an *initiation*. It predisposes to better tasks. Temperance and fortitude do not exhaust the catalogue of the virtues: there remain justice and the theological virtues. *With them we go out from the self*, in them the spiritual life will experience its true flowering. We have not made ourselves good and beautiful in order to take pleasure in such subjective excellence indefinitely, but in order to make certain of having the liberty to devote our attention to ends which, since they surpass man, will have the power to enlarge him to their own measure. Let us say a word about these virtues and define their role in a spiritual life which is conceived according to prudence.

Justice and its Connections

We do not usually think of *justice* as a virtue of spiritual interest. Its function is with the relationships of social life, and its matter is secular in its essence. The care of one's perfection is one thing, it is thought, that of rendering every man his due, another. Justice, again, is but an ordinary virtue; care for perfection, on the other hand, distinguishes souls set aside for a higher vocation. These reflections have a certain amount of truth in them. Justice is, indeed, the elementary form of the moral life and the most unformed consciences have some realization of this type of virtue: people already know that it is good to render to every

man his due, when they are still unaware that it is good to control one's passions. But whatever be the origin and order of development of moral consciousness, it has to be maintained that, from the point of view of value, *justice takes priority over temperance and fortitude*. The two latter, as we have said, put order into the subject's passions. Justice, on the contrary, adapts the subject to the good of society, which is of higher value than the good estate of some one particular person. It befits man in so far as he has become part of a whole. It links him up harmoniously with the whole and makes him, for the future, give as objective to his actions this multiple and so to speak unlimited good which is called the common good. Will people not realize that the sense of the common good represents a stage in the development of the spiritual life? It could happen that the latter might engender a kind of egoism. Certain people are concerned with their soul to the extent that they come to lose sight of the human ensemble in which they are nevertheless embedded. Even supposing they respect commutative justice, they certainly do not cultivate in themselves legal justice, the justice which aims at the common good and ordains the practice of the other virtues to this great end. The familiar contrast of the earthly city and the heavenly country perhaps contributes to lessen, in the eyes of spiritual people, the lustre of a virtue of which Aristotle said that neither the splendour of the dawn or that of the setting sun were comparable to it. The widespread notion of the spiritual life as something chiefly contemplative by nature must also prove an obstacle to the esteem of a virtue turned towards external operations. But we still have to decide whether the spiritual is not involved in a social milieu and whether the common good does not retain its superiority over one's own particular good. No zeal for interior perfection confers the right to withdraw oneself from the obligations deriving from the actual condition in which one finds oneself. *It is not for anyone to live among men as if he were alone in the world*. And how could it be right to neglect the resources of virtue which other men and the ensemble of social life constitute for us? One is certainly wrong in abstracting such things from the constituent elements of a spiritual life. The idea of solitude is perhaps responsible for its share of the dichotomy against which we are protesting. The idea of the spiritual life in society should be substituted. Since man is a social animal, how could he sanctify

himself torn away from his vital milieu? Justice deserves to be re-integrated in the spiritual life. It is readily granted that obedience is one of the distinctive virtues of the soul devoted to perfection; but we have said that obedience is to be understood in relation to the promotion of the common good: it belongs to that order of virtue which is governed by the cardinal virtue of justice. Other virtues should figure in the same context, particularly the noble virtues of respect which the presence of other men around us involves, and which should find their chief expression in the virtue of religion.

For it is worthy of note that the latter presents itself as the transposition on to the plane of God of the attitudes of respect called for on our part by the different categories of human persons with whom we are in touch. *Religion is a kind of justice.* It renders to God what belongs to him, as justice makes us render to our fellow-men what they have the right to receive from us. There is no spiritual life at all without religion, assuredly. Hence it is that we must agree that justice, in its highest form, belongs to the spiritual life. The sense of the other than oneself and the care to pay what one owes that other are common both to religion and justice. One must never be afraid of acknowledging this relationship. It may perhaps lead to the rectification of the idea that certain spiritual people are liable to form of religion. They tend to make it an inward thing, limited to a more or less passive attitude of the soul in the presence of the Majesty of God. Worship with its accompanying activities and display of external manifestations does not find favour with them. Yet worship is essential to religion. It is through worship that man's debt towards God is acquitted—imperfectly, we grant. The religious mind is eager to express its homage in this effective way. Far from being confined to interior occupations, spiritual life thus comes to be integrated with the whole order of the liturgy. Mental prayer does not suffice for everything. If it is a good sign for a spiritual life not to have to eliminate any of the authentic activities in which the Christian religion has always expressed itself, it will be agreed that objective spirituality shows an advantage on this point.

(To be concluded)